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Survival after Death among the Ba-Bemba of North-Eastern Rhodesia. *By The Rev. H. Barnes.* 26

One is familiar with the idea that such immortality, or rather survival, as forms part of the belief of the Bantu is only limited, and that there is probably no idea of immortality or indefinite survival. A curious belief and practice illustrating and confirming this came to my notice lately here in N. E. Rhodesia, among the Ba-Bemba. I was making inquiry of some Christian teachers of quite limited education as to the significance of the word "*mupashi*," which is sometimes used in translation into Chi-Bemba to render the English "spirit" or the Greek πνεῦμα. I was told that "*mupashi*" means the disembodied spirit that parts from the body at death, but that it would be wrong to speak of the spirit of a living person as "*mupashi*" or to apply the word to any spiritual being that had never been embodied. Also it would not be the right word to use in such phrases as "giving up the ghost," "commending the spirit." In these latter phrases the word "*moyo*," connoting rather the vital spark, and not anything personal or individual, would appear to be appropriate.

The "*mupashi*," when it leaves the body, goes far and near, seeking among people of the same clan as the person from whom it has come, until it finds a newborn babe as yet unnamed. The *mupashi* suffers under the disadvantage of being invisible and incapable of producing audible sounds, and in these parts it has not yet learnt to communicate by means of tables or planchette. It must find a medium who will be able to interpret its wishes and convey them to the right address. But what is its message and how does it attract attention? Its desire is to secure the transmission of the name borne by its last owner, so that that name may not die out and with it the memory of its holder and the existence of the *mupashi*. The *mupashi* is thus seen to be struggling for its own survival. It calls attention to itself and its desire by making the newborn babe of its family cry and cry until its parents in despair send for the *sing'anga* or diviner. The *sing'anga* is able to understand and communicate with the *mupashi*, but almost as awkwardly as our own table turners

* Thurston, "Tribes and Castes of Southern India, 1909"; Iyer, "Cochin Tribes and Castes," 1909; Nanjunadayya, "Ethnographic Survey of Mysore."

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775 He is quick to know that the child's crying is caused by the *mupashi* who wants to
787 confer a name, but he can only find out which name the *mupashi* is interested in by
553 going over the names of the great men of the family. The name may be that of a quite remote ancestor, although the *mupashi* is but recently freed. The process of carrying on the name may have begun long ago in the interest of some specially memorable man or woman. The child, by the way, may be of either sex. The *mupashi* will indicate that the right name has been pronounced by leaving the babe in peace. When the babe ceases to cry at one of the names offered, the *sing'anga* announces that the child is to bear that name, and the mothers see to it that it is so. If all the bearers of a name so conferred die out, the name is forgotten, the ancestor no longer survives even as a *mupashi*, and a full stop is reached in that chain.

The new-born child is always or usually named in this way. In the case of twins
[845] the first-born will have a name so given, but the second will be called simply "Twin," "Pundu."

H. BARNES.

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